

Women and Art Answer Attacks on Modesty of Women

Penrhyn Stanlaws Says There Is No Such Thing as Immodesty In Dress

By Helen Hester Hill

CHURCHMEN, educators and jurists have expressed themselves in no uncertain terms in recent days as regards the morality of present styles in women's clothes. So far as those who have been quoted are concerned it appears to be the unanimous opinion that the situation is very bad indeed; that our morals are close to the rocks all because women's clothes display more or less of the human form divine.

In an effort to ascertain whether the state of the nation was entirely hopeless I decided to ask the opinion of Art in order to see if something might not be said on the side of beauty. As the mouthpiece of Art I chose one of her most distinguished sons, Penrhyn Stanlaws, painter and illustrator.

Creator of a Type

Mr. Stanlaws is peculiarly adapted to speak with final authority on this subject, for he has created and stamped a type of American girl, distinct and unique—the girl of to-day, in the dress and period and manners of the day. And the "Stanlaws girl," it is generally conceded, whether in country or city dress, evening or morning gown, in sports or in the drawing room picture of languid grace, is always "Miss America" to the life.

So, after stumbling over carpentering and coils of electric lighting, getting behind scenery and in front of numberless persons, breathless and grateful to land finally safe, I was in the tiny cubicle that serves this great artist as office and consulting room in the studios of the Famous Players that I at last put my question:

"What do you think of the present-day dress? Do you think it enhances or detracts from woman's beauty?"

"It decidedly increases both her grace and her beauty," he said. "The most obvious thing about clothes, the reason for their existence, in fact, and the one thing most generally lost sight of, is that they are worn solely to keep out the cold. The Esquimaux uses his instinct to fashion heavy, cumbersome fur garments, not because he thinks they are beautiful or fashionable, but because they keep him warm. And by the same token the inhabitants at the equator go without clothes, being afforded all the protection they need by their own climate, the morals of both remaining quite unaffected."

Nakedness and Nudity

"There is a marked distinction between nakedness and nudity," he went on. "The Greek art, basis of all art in all ages, in spite of superficial changes, is essentially a nude art. But would any one call it an immoral art? In wandering through a museum, enjoying the classic sculpture, does it ever occur to you that you are looking at naked women? Certainly not; one's feeling is of awe for the nature that created such perfection and an art that would so marvelously interpret and repeat her loveliness."

"Nor did the Greek dress, showing, as it did, every line and lineament of a woman's figure, ever seem in the least immodest. The lines and transparency of to-day are harking back to that period, and unless it were to protect herself from the elements, there is no more reason why woman should load herself down with thick, beauty-destroying garments now than existed then in that period of artistic perfection. The women of Egypt and of Rome dressed for the streets exactly as they did in the boudoir or drawing room."

"Then you would say that if she could keep warm enough the woman of to-day would be justified in dressing the same way?" I asked.

No Immodesty in Dress

"Precisely," he answered. "There is no such thing as modesty or immodesty in dress. There is only beauty or its lack. Now, personally, I rarely like a short skirt, not because it displays the ankle, not at all, but because it usually foreshortens the wearer and destroys the symmetry of her figure. Proportion is essential to beauty of line. For this reason a transparent long skirt that preserves both line and beauty is preferable. And the same standard applies to back or throat or arms. The ugly fat woman will naturally seek cover, while whatever she is to the undulating grace and beauty of a lovely woman is more than justified sartorially."

"Do you think that clothes set the style of beauty, Mr. Stanlaws?" I asked further, "or does the recognized beauty determine the style of clothes?"

"The styles are carefully chosen to bring out the accepted types of beauty. The most artistic dress

designer is the one who accentuates the line and carriage and figure of the mode. Beauty is a relative term anyway. It varies not only from age to age, but almost by decades. Imagine the women of Rubens, for instance. Would any one to-day consider them beautiful? And yet they undoubtedly typified the beauty of their time. And they, in turn, materially differed from the women painted by the great Dutch masters, a Rembrandt or a Hals, for example, and so it goes, from period to period.

Our Modern Type

"Our modern woman has more in common with the great English beauties, either the Gainsborough Reynolds or Raeburn types, or even the more recent English girl, except that the American woman has gained tremendously to her advantage through the mixed breeding of the New World. Inbreeding makes for the perpetuation of unfavorable as well as the lovelier characteristics."

"What would you consider a general essential to beauty in the American woman of to-day?" I wanted to know.

"Our period," he said, "is essentially one of transition, of fluidity. And these qualities are markedly reflected in our women. More important than feature, than coloring of skin, of hair or of eyes, I should say is great animation, vivacity, mobility, coupled with a certain pensiveness, a look almost of sadness. Few other qualities in woman's beauty hold such allure as this. It arouses a man's wonder and his emotions. 'What is behind that look?' he asks himself. 'Is she sad, does she need my help, my protection?' And so, the strongest instinct in man for woman, his protective instinct, being awakened, he is forthwith held and arrested, whereas, of course, a perpetual smile," added the artist, "causes no such speculation."

"All else is comparatively incien-



tal. Whether the nose is straight or retroussé, the hair dark or blond, eyes blue or brown, the figure tall or short. If height be a consideration at all, it is only because so often one finds that in the case of a small woman her head is too large for the rest of her body. Again it is proportion that determines the grace and symmetry and beauty. Our modern type reverts more to the pre-Raphaelite period, more to the medieval princess, tall, languorous, slender and willowy."

No Perfect Models

Asked whether any one model ever represented the sum total of his artistic conception and ideal of beauty, Mr. Stanlaws replied, "No." That his "girls" all were composites of several, even many, models.

"If one did find one's ideal, it would at once cease to be an ideal, wouldn't it?" he asked.

After waiting a moment I ventured to intrude with my next question, concerning Mr. Stanlaws's aims in the motion picture industry, into which field he has but recently entered. What at first seemed a rather strange adventure on his part was defined more clearly as he talked about it. In spite of the marvels so far accomplished, the motion pictures, not as an industry so much as from the purely dramatic and artistic standpoint, are still in their swaddling clothes. And it is with this recognition that the services of such men as Barrie, Stanlaws and many others of dramatic and artistic note, to say nothing of the eminent actors from the speaking stage, are being enlisted, so that through the wonderful medium of the camera not only varied types can be introduced, but whole and

successive stages of their lives and emotions, their manner of dressing and of behaving through all the stress and complexity of the manifold conditions of modern life.

Girls of To-day

Mr. Stanlaws feels that the real American girl should be depicted more freely and more faithfully in the modern pictures. The Western girl, and that not as she is to-day but as she was thirty or forty years ago, has been done to death. Let the more representative girl take her place. And dramatist as well as artist, Mr. Stanlaws is putting all his artistic fervor and genius into the work of writing and pro-

ducing and assembling the most realistic and the truest types of interest to the restless, exacting theatergoers of to-day.

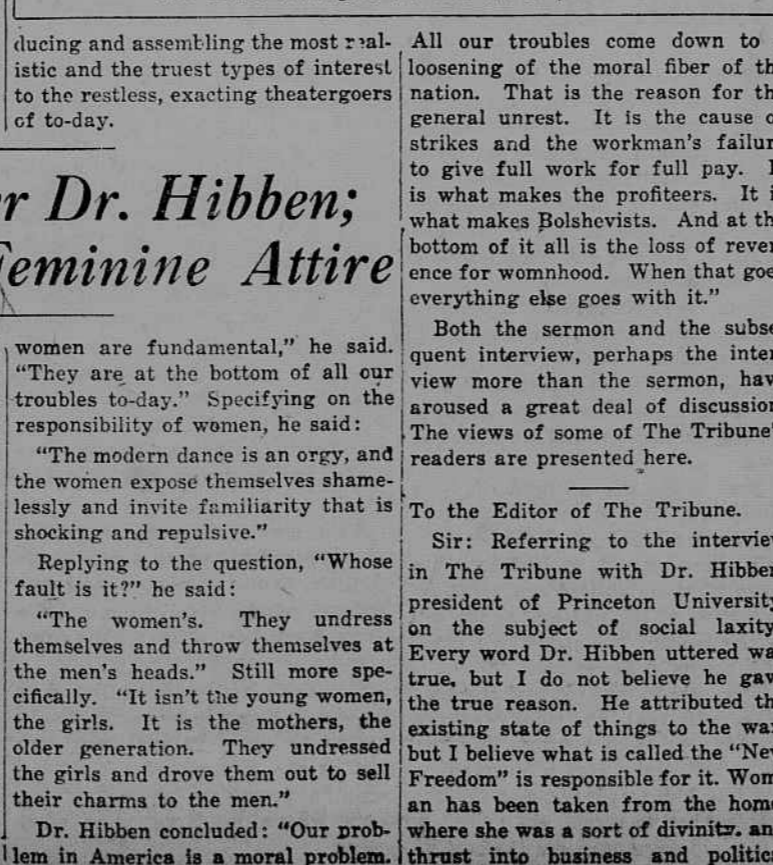
Women Answer Dr. Hibben; Defend Feminine Attire

DR. JOHN GRIER HIBBEN, president of Princeton, in his baccalaureate sermon this year, told the graduating class of Princeton that "in our social relations we are weakly allowing ourselves to be ruled by the Goddess of Folly. There is danger of a lessening if not a loss of the old-time reverence for womanhood. There is no longer an aura of mystery about the young woman of to-day. To-day our illusions seem to be gone; everything is obvious; no word is left unsaid and no veil withdrawn."

In an interview with The Tribune a few days later, published June 27, he elaborated his theme.

"The relations between men and

PENRHYN STANLAWS (costless) and three examples of the American girl he has made famous



All our troubles come down to a loosening of the moral fiber of the nation. That is the reason for the general unrest. It is the cause of strikes and the workman's failure to give full work for full pay. It is what makes the profiteers. It is what makes Bolsheviks. And at the bottom of it all is the loss of reverence for womanhood. When that goes everything else goes with it."

Both the sermon and the subsequent interview, perhaps the interview more than the sermon, have aroused a great deal of discussion. The views of some of The Tribune's readers are presented here.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: Referring to the interview in The Tribune with Dr. Hibben, president of Princeton University, on the subject of social laxity: Every word Dr. Hibben uttered was true, but I do not believe he gave the true reason. He attributed the existing state of things to the war, but I believe what is called the "New Freedom" is responsible for it. Woman has been taken from the home, where she was a sort of divinity, and thrust into business and politics,

where she has lost her "veil of mystery," as Dr. Hibben puts it. We see the result. But this is really not surprising. It has been prophesied. Perhaps the great Balzac (who knew woman) put it best when he said: "To emancipate woman would be to enslave her."

STRVINS.
New York, July 1, 1920.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: It was my privilege to hear Dr. Hibben's baccalaureate sermon at Princeton that has caused such decided reactions and to read the interview with him published in The Tribune. There are certain statements in it that require refutation.

There is a certain element of irony in the fact that never has the sight of a woman in evening dress had quite the appeal of suggestiveness that I find in Dr. Hibben's "they undress themselves and throw themselves at men's heads." And, again, "The mothers undressed the girls and drove them out to sell their charms to the men." Those two lines will undoubtedly have more evil effect upon the minds of the young men and women who read them than six months of ordinary social experience.

Dr. Hibben charges that the relations between the sexes are lax—by implication, more lax than formerly. How does he know?

This cannot be concluded simply by watching couples dancing with their heads together, or held closely together—by the men—or by noting that some women wear dresses that are too low. Victorian mothers made the same untrue charge when they first beheld their daughters waiting.

He charges that women "invite a

way the superior of the Victorian woman, who, evidently, is Dr. Hibben's ideal. It is unjust to charge women with the ulterior motives and sex consciousness in dress, manners and dance that he mentions. The women of the Victorian period who dressed themselves as prudish to satisfy the ideas of their queen were quite as completely the slaves of fashion as are women to-day.

The problem, so far as the observer and thinker is concerned, is psychological. At each step forward toward a more broad-minded, a more frank and truthful basis for the relations between men and women, there are always individuals who see in the latest innovation or advancement a license for self-indulgence. They go to extremes, and by them the academician is apt to judge the development of human relations, whereas he, above all, should maintain the detached, philosophical view which can explain to others that the influence and example of the extremists fade away, while the vast bulk of humanity always proceeds with its orderly, inevitable development.

D. F. HUBBELL.
Saratoga Springs, N. Y., June 28.

Monday, June 28.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: Does it occur to you that Dr. Hibben, like Nelson, claps the glass to his blind eye and refuses to see what is happening? Education for women that makes it possible for them to go out and not only earn a good living, but do interesting work and meet interesting people, has for a long time been appreciably thinning the ranks of girls who are obsessed with sex, or who look on

familiarity that is shocking and repulsive." Does he mean that the invitation is shocking or the familiarity which they invite. If he means the former, the answer is that in nine cases out of ten this so-called "invitation" is an expression of the frankness and self-consciousness that characterize the relations between young men and women as compared with fifty years ago, and the "invitation" part of it lies wholly in the man's ready mind. The average girl is entirely unconscious of any such invitation as some men seem to find in their manners.

If Dr. Hibben thinks the "invited" familiarity is shocking, what does he think of the familiarity of ten, twenty or a hundred years ago? Twenty years ago girls were quite as willing to be kissed and hugged and "petted" as they are now, only at that time they were possibly more secretive about it.

He states there is danger of loss of the oldtime "reverence for womanhood." Quite true. The oldtime reverence was based upon a misconception of woman. She was neither the helpless thing nor the innocent prude that men thought her to be. If he despairs of man's conception of womanhood, let Dr. Hibben read the fourteenth and thirteenth century writers, and then thank Heaven that a man now accepts woman as a comrade, as an equal, appreciating her for what she is, rather than reverencing her for what she was not.

He states that the oldtime "aura of mystery" was at once her defense and her glory. As a matter of fact, there is nothing quite so suggestive to the masculine mind as an "aura of mystery." And as for defense—knowledge, the ability to discuss the problems, is a far better defense than either timidity or mere modesty.

The woman of to-day is in every

their sex as their only means of support.

There is a desperate situation at hand I'll admit, but not the one that Dr. Hibben pictures. The situation that really threatens is that girls sick unto death of having fatuous wisecracks dictate what they should and should not do will become even more independent than they now are. The man of to-morrow will have to offer something more than silly small talk borrowed from professional humorists and clumsy courtship, or he will never be able to distract her from her other interests.

But let us assume that everything that Dr. Hibben says is true, and listen to the comment of two girls who attend proms and other festivities at Princeton:

"I am sure that I would love to meet those two young men of whom Dr. Hibben speaks," one says, "who 'hold their heads back at a painful angle to keep their faces away from their partners.' I have never noticed the slightest reluctance on the part of my partners—quite the opposite—and I have had some painful experiences, too, trying to keep my head back from my partners."

But the other is more surprising:

"No more college proms for me; the men are so disgusting; they are so utterly wrapped up in sex. The idea never gets into their silly, vain little heads that all men are alike emotionally, and that it is only mentally that they can interest us. I am going in for Socialism next year and meet some men that I can respect."

Men like Dr. Hibben and John Roach Straton and George Moore will continue to live to the age when they like to throw mud at young people, but there is some obligation on the part of a newspaper to print such maunderings?

Yours sincerely,
LOUISE WILLIAMS.
10 West Twelfth Street.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: Why is the sex question always uppermost in the minds of so many male intellectuals? Why do their analytical minds ever hark back to it in their search for first causes? The latest and heaviest opprobrium has just been cast upon the "wicked" sex by Dr. John Grier Hibben when he blames it anew for all the ills to which mankind has fallen heir presumably from the fall of Rome to profaneering in sugar.

It is characteristic of men whether they be of intellectual mold or the commoner types that they hesitate not at all to interpret feminine behavior according to their own point of view. If masculinity decides woman's dress indecent the decree goes forth to the world that feminine raiment proceeds from an impure mind intent upon arousing men's animal passions. Collectively speaking, in ninety-eight cases out of a hundred such a conclusion is a base lie and an injustice founded upon the preponderance in the masculine mind of the sex desire which is pretty generally conceded to be stronger in the male than in the female. It is cowardly of man to try to blame its nearness to the surface upon the designs of woman.

The fact that women intuitively love beauty and that those possessing it in varying degrees seek quite naturally to enhance it without any deliberate sex motive evidently cannot be appreciated by the masculine mind, which is befogged by the more lurid glare of passion. All this recent talk on the part of the frightened ones seems pretty much of an unintentional confession that it is not for man to view an attractive woman impersonally.

Men of education and culture might be expected to recognize the difference between the sensual and the sensuous. Yet if they do, apparently they cannot apply the nice distinction in regard to women. Can men only enjoy feminine beauty without sinning when it is in cold marble or pigment? Why must his reaction to loveliness in the flesh always be evil? Catalogue in hand, he may declare about the exquisite purity of a nude, but a warm bare shoulder or the suggested lines of a live woman's form must arouse a wish for unholiness. Perhaps he is not to be censured if it is his nature always to separate the spirit and the flesh, but why does he meanly blame the promptings of his coarser being upon the woman? Many men try to make it appear that their desire is essentially the effect of a sort of poison gas emanating from the feminine mind. Is this chivalry?

The Creator made the sexes complementary one to the other, and so long as His plan obtains, temptation—if one chooses to call it that—will exist for man and for woman regardless of fashions in clothes or dancing.

J. W. H.
Brooklyn, June 29, 1920.